



United States Mission to the OSCE

Right of Reply to Belarus: Observation of U.S. Elections

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Paul W. Jones
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 4, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

At the October 28 meeting of the Permanent Council, the Ambassador of Belarus made an intervention regarding efforts by the Belarusian Embassy in Washington to observe the November 2 U.S. general election in three U.S. states and the District of Columbia.

Mr. Chairman, the United States categorically rejects the contention of the Belarusian Ambassador that the United States is "trying to suppress any possible criticism on its own account in the OSCE as well as to put itself in an exceptional position as compared with other member states."

The United States Federal Government has been working to facilitate cooperation between international observers and appropriate state and local election officials, including providing assistance to observers from the OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission as well as the Belarus Embassy in Washington.

At the request of the Embassy of Belarus, the U.S. Department of State contacted elections officials in Virginia and in the District of Columbia to gather information about procedures for observer status and to facilitate communication between the Embassy of Belarus and these officials about observing.

We understand that in the end nine officials from the Belarusian bilateral embassy were able to observe elections in five Virginia counties.

We are also pleased to note that four Belarusians participated in the OSCE observation mission and were able to observe elections in Virginia and California.

Mr. Chairman, the contention of the Belarusian Ambassador that the U.S. is trying to shield itself from criticism is belied by the fact that the freedom and vigor of public debate in the United States reveals our strengths and weaknesses, accomplishments and failings for all to see, including all the participating States in the OSCE.

We stand by our previously stated concern that Belarusian efforts to highlight challenges facing the U.S. election system stem not from a genuine interest in the development of democracy in the United States, but aim, rather, at diverting attention from Belarus' own systematic disregard for OSCE commitments.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.